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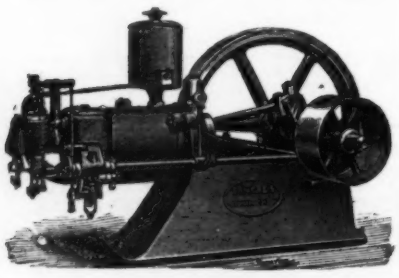

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The adjourned ordinary general meeting was held on Monday, at Winchester House, Mr. W. Nelson presiding, for the purpose of receiving the report of the committee of shareholders, appointed on the 3rd inst. to inquire into the company's affairs. Mr. Charles Eves presented the report, which dealt mainly with three points—first, the prices paid by the company for mutton and beef in Argentina; secondly, the rates of freight, and the quantities shipped; and thirdly, the means adopted for disposing of the same through the wholesale and retail channels. With regard to the first point, the committee found that, comparing the prices for the two years 1902 and 1903, a very considerable increase in the cost occurred during the latter half of last year. It would be undesirable to disclose the actual quantities or prices, but, in the aggregate, the net realisations during 1903 showed a decrease of about £275,000 on the mutton and beef shipped to England, and a falling off of £53,000 in the profits on the shipments to South Africa. The question of freights was one of special importance and had not, they thought, been adequately explained by the directors. The steamships engaged in carrying the meat belonging to the Nelson Line, Limited, two of whose directors, the chairman and Mr. G. Harris, were respectively chairman and deputy-chairman of this company. In fact, only one director of this company, Mr. Robert Cooper, was entirely independent of the steamship company. Reference having been made to the onerous condition of the charterparty under which the company had been working with the Nelson Line, the committee stated that the proposed new contract was of a more favourable nature, and, having considered the matter from every point of view, they were disposed to recommend its acceptance. As to the selling of the meat, particularly in reference to the shops, which now numbered 980, against 700 two years ago, they observed that, broadly speaking, the policy of having a retail outlet for the company's shipments was a sound one. As to the constitution of the board, the committee expressed the opinion that two additional directors should be appointed, who would directly represent the general body of shareholders. The disappointing results of last year's trading were attributable to the causes assigned by the directors, together with the onerous charterparty in existence with the Nelson Line, under which large quantities of meat were shipped which could not be profitably disposed of. In the course of some supplementary remarks, Mr. Eves said that during the past year 1,500 additional shareholders had come upon the register, and, therefore, the position was very different from what it was when the Nelson family held by far the largest number of shares. In the changed circumstances, it was only equitable that the general body of shareholders, about 2,800, should be properly represented on the directorate. He concluded by remarking that the committee did not cast any reflection on the integrity of the members of the board, or upon the correctness of the accounts. The company possessed a business which, he felt certain, would yield satisfactory profits in normal times.

The Chairman remarked that his colleagues and himself were naturally pleased to hear the committee say that they had found everything, so far as the working of the business was concerned, in perfect order. He consented to the appointment of the committee as a concession to the minority, and in order that their interests might be protected. At the last meeting he could have outvoted the proposal by four to one had he chosen to do so. This company had never suffered from the fact that certain members of the board had also been directors of the steamship company. On the contrary, better terms had been secured by them for their shipments than would have been obtained had he not been on the board of both companies. Last January he expressed his wish to retire from the directorate, but, at the urgent request of his colleagues, he agreed to continue to act in order "to see things through." However, owing to the action of one or two of the shareholders, he should certainly carry out his intention of resigning, and he did so from that time. He then moved the adoption of the report and accounts, which were submitted at the previous meeting.

Mr. Harris, in seconding the motion, said that it was a mistake to suppose that it was owing to the charterparty that large quantities of meat were shipped which could not be profitably disposed of. The explanation was to be found in the necessity of keeping their employés together at the factory.

The motion was eventually adopted, and the proposed amended contract with the Nelson Line was also approved. A committee, consisting of Mr. John Morris, Mr. Van Raalte, Mr. J. Hill, Mr. Anderson, Mr. J. Balfour, Mr. Eves, and Mr. Hector Morrison, was appointed to consult with the board in reference to the appointment of new directors.

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